

First Pink-backed Pelican *Pelecanus rufescens* sightings in Madagascar since 1960

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Premières observations du Pélican gris *Pelecanus rufescens* à Madagascar depuis 1960. Trois observations du Pélican gris *Pelecanus rufescens* au Lac Bedo, dans le sud-ouest de Madagascar, sont rapportées: deux individus ont été vus le 21 septembre 2003 et un individu le 18 novembre et le 12 décembre 2004. L'espèce n'avait plus été vue depuis 1960.

On the morning of 18 November 2004, a pelican was sighted at Lake Bedo (19°55'S 44°32'E), south-west Madagascar, by a group of eight Tropical Biology Association course participants (for a description of the site, see Young & Razafindrajaob 2006). The bird flew out of the vegetation on a small island near the middle of the lake, c.500 m from the shore. It circled around the island for c.7 minutes before disappearing again into the vegetation, from which it did not emerge. At one point the pelican came as close as c.100 m from the shore. It thus gave the observers ample opportunity to note its features and consult an identification guide (Langrand 1990) while it was still in view.

The bird was largely whitish with a pale grey cast. The bill and pouch appeared pale grey. It had a black patch in front of the eye resembling a teardrop from a distance. In flight, there was no conspicuous contrast between the dark flight-feathers and the pale grey wing-coverts.

MM, who first noticed the bird, identified it as a Pink-backed Pelican *Pelecanus rufescens*, based on the above features. Great White Pelican *P. onocrotalus* is larger and whiter and has darker, blackish, flight-feathers. He pointed it out to Dr Julia Jones, the group leader, who agreed with his identification. Other group members also positively identified the pelican from the guidebook. MM returned to the site with another group of students in the afternoon, but the pelican was not seen again.

FR, having been informed by Dr Jones of the observation, visited the site on 12 December 2004 and found the pelican still present. FR had seen two pelicans at Lake Bedo previously, on 21 September 2003, but had been unable to positively identify them to species. Having subsequently

observed the two pelican species in Kenya, he is now confident that these birds were also *P. rufescens*, based on the above features.

These are the first pelican sightings in Madagascar since 1960 (Langrand 1990, Morris & Hawkins 1998). Pink-backed Pelican was first mentioned for Madagascar by Verreaux (1865) and the species was subsequently known as an accidental visitor (Delacour 1932). Paulian (1959), citing P. Griveaud, reports the discovery of a small breeding colony south-west of Antsalova, c.150 km north of Lake Bedo, in 1958. A group was seen by Y. Therezien and R. Legendre in August 1959 north of Belo-sur-Tsiribihina, c.75 km north of Lake Bedo (Milon *et al.* 1973). The colony in the Antsalova Lake region was still present in 1960 (Paulian 1961), but as there were no subsequent sightings it is thought that the colony was exterminated by local villagers (Langrand 1990, Morris & Hawkins 1998). Although the possibility of a colony existing somewhere in the country cannot be entirely eliminated, most observers consider the species to be a vagrant. Pink-backed Pelican is the only pelican observed in Madagascar to date. Great White Pelican, a common migratory species in East Africa that could reach Madagascar as a vagrant, has never been recorded from the Malagasy region (Elliott 1992).

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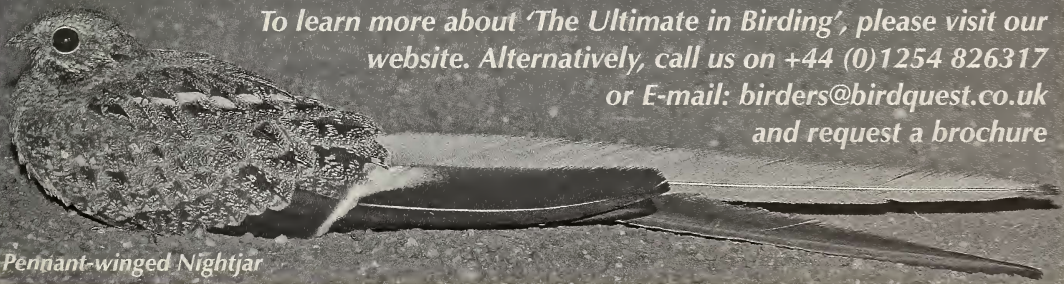
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